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Tongass
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Forest
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July 1998



Crane and Rowan Mountain Timber Sales

Record of Decision and Summary of the Final Environmental Impact Statement



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Crane and Rowan Mountain Timber Sales Record of Decision

Introduction

This Record of Decision documents my decision to select an alternative from the Crane and Rowan Mountain Timber Sales Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS). The selection includes the specific harvest unit locations, and requirements for harvesting timber and constructing associated roads.

Background

The proposed project is a component of the overall timber sale program on the Tongass National Forest. Timber sales are allowed by the Forest Plan in order to maintain a supply of timber from National Forest System lands for Southeast Alaska.

Project History

The suitable forest lands analyzed for this sale were originally proposed for timber harvest as part of the North and East Kuiu Environmental Impact Statement completed in 1993. The harvest units in North and East Kuiu EIS were prepared for the Alaska Pulp Corporation (APC), but with the termination of APC's timber sale contract in 1994, the timber was not harvested by APC. Efforts to sell some of the North and East Kuiu sale units as independent timber sales were legally challenged in *AWRTA v. Morrison*. The lawsuit resulted in a settlement that required the Forest Service to complete additional environmental analysis on some units before harvest could occur. The Crane and Rowan Mountain Timber Sales include sale units previously proposed on north Kuiu Island with the application of new standards and guidelines from the 1997 Forest Plan. Harvest in the unroaded eastern part of Kuiu Island is not included in this EIS.

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process for the Crane and Rowan Mountain Timber Sales began as two separate Environmental Assessments (EAs). However, in response to public input, we decided to document the analysis of these two proposed timber sales in a single EIS.

Public scoping, data collection and analysis, and documentation began in April, 1997. A Draft EIS was distributed in January, 1998. Public review and comments on the Draft EIS were collected until March 30, 1998. Each of the comments have been reviewed and answered, and the EIS revised accordingly.

Record of Decision

Purpose and Need

The Crane and Rowan Mountain Timber Sales are designed to respond to the goals and objectives listed in the Forest Plan, and to move the project area toward the desired future condition. The Forest Plan identifies the following goals and objectives:

- Maintain and promote industrial wood production from suitable timberlands, providing a continuous supply of wood to meet society's needs.
- Manage these lands for sustained long-term timber yields.
- Seek to provide a supply of timber from the Tongass National Forest which meets the annual and planning-cycle market demand, consistent with land use designation standards and guidelines.

The Crane and Rowan Mountain Timber Sales respond to these goals and objectives by using an ecosystem management approach. By using the principles of disturbance ecology, the effects of timber management on wildlife habitat and other resources will be minimized while harvesting some timber.

Decision

This Record of Decision documents my decision to make timber available from the Crane and Rowan Mountain project area on Kuiu Island, in accordance with the Forest Plan. My decision includes the following:

- whether timber volume should be made available for harvest, and if so, how much;
- the location and design of harvest units and roads;
- mitigation and monitoring measures associated with implementation of timber harvest; and,
- whether there may be a significant restriction on subsistence uses.

It is my decision to choose Alternative 4 from the Final EIS as the selected alternative for implementation in the Crane and Rowan Mountain project area. This decision meets the purpose and need for the project, is consistent with the Forest Plan, and is responsive to the issues raised during scoping and to the public comment. Alternative 4 will harvest 24 million board feet (MMBF) of timber and construct about eight miles of road.

I have determined that there is not a significant possibility of a significant restriction on subsistence uses of deer, other wildlife, fish, shellfish, marine mammals, other foods, and timber resources as a result of this project. I have made this determination after careful review of the subsistence analysis and public input from subsistence users, the Organized Village of Kake, and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game.

I have based this decision upon the results of an analysis including habitat modeling of wildlife population trends, human population trends, subsistence use in the area in which this project occurs as well as the important areas it avoids. I believe the new protection measures established by the Forest Plan, and the project design, based on the concepts of disturbance ecology specified in Alternative 4, will minimize impacts to deer and wildlife resources.

Reasons for the Decision

In making my decision, I considered all issues raised during the development and scoping of this project and took into account the competing interests and values of the public. Many divergent opinions were expressed during the analysis. This decision may not completely satisfy any one particular group or individual. However, I have considered all views and feel my decision is reasonable. The selected alternative provides a beneficial mix of resources for the public within the framework of the existing laws, regulations, policies, public needs and desires, and capabilities of the land, while meeting the stated purpose and need for this project. I believe that Alternative 4 also best meets the goals and objectives developed for the area under the Forest Plan while balancing site specific concerns unique to the project area.

Although all action alternatives address the purpose and need to one degree or another, Alternative 4 has several characteristics that resulted in it being identified as the selected alternative:

- It emulates to the greatest extent the natural disturbance processes and landscape patterns existing within the project area.
- It allows a high potential for adaptive management by providing the opportunity to monitor results of the diameter limit harvest prescription. The purpose of this monitoring is to determine the effectiveness of this stand treatment in meeting both timber production and habitat conservation objectives.
- It will best achieve the desired condition for scenic quality especially on the south facing slope of Rowan Mountain.
 - It has the least potential to affect the places and resources important for traditional subsistence purposes.
- It balances the identified issues with timber volume, economics, and associated jobs better than the other alternatives.

My decision to implement this selected alternative is in conformance with the Tongass Land Management Plan (1997), and sound national forest management practices. In making my decision, I have balanced the need to meet market demand for timber, and the need to help maintain a current timber supply in support of community stability, with the need to provide strong protection measures for soil, water, fish, wildlife, subsistence, and visual resources.

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In addition, Alternative 4 best addresses many of the concerns brought up during public scoping:

- This alternative avoids harvest in the most important subsistence areas.
- Several units were dropped to reduce impacts to important deer winter range.
- Units were designed for partial harvest with a 50% canopy cover retention which will minimize impacts to deer habitat.
- A travel corridor is maintained from Security Bay to the top of the nearby ridge.
- Partial harvest methods were chosen to lessen potential impacts to Security Creek and Dean Creek watersheds.
- All new roads will be closed after timber harvest.
- Known goshawk nests will be protected.
- Stream protection measures and Best Management Practices are expected to preclude measurable effects on fish habitat and water quality.
- The project represents a viable balance between timber sale economics and resource protection

Key Issues

In making my decision, I took into consideration the four major issues identified during the planning process. In the following summary, I disclose how the selected alternative addresses each of these key issues. Table 2-2 and Chapter 3 of the Final EIS supplement the discussion and provide a comparison of the alternatives.

Habitat Conservation

The selected alternative will have the least impact to wildlife habitat of any of the action alternatives. This alternative is designed to emulate to the extent possible the natural disturbance processes and landscape patterns within the project area. All clearcut openings will be small and will retain some overstory structure (10 to 15 percent canopy cover). The partial harvest units are designed to retain an average of 50 percent canopy cover. This should provide sufficient structural diversity within the stand to maintain much of the wildlife habitat values in the foreseeable future. For a detailed analysis of the habitat conservation issue, see Chapter 3 of the Final EIS.

Watershed Effects

All alternatives are designed to fully implement current Best Management Practices (BMPs) and riparian standards and guidelines in the Forest Plan. All the alternatives are expected to meet State of Alaska water quality standards. While planning this timber sale, a detailed watershed analysis was

completed for both Security Creek and Dean Creek watersheds to determine the current condition of these watersheds in light of past harvest activities. Both watersheds were found to be in good condition, however the selected alternative will build no new roads in either watershed. All harvest in these watersheds will be by partial harvest method rather than by clearcut.

Timber Economics

The selected alternative converts 1,056 acres of mature forest to young even-aged, or two-aged stands. Approximately 897 acres would be harvested using partial harvest that leaves varying densities of reserve trees. Trees cut in partial harvest units will be yarded by helicopter. Approximately 159 acres would be harvested as clearcuts with reserve legacy trees.

The selected alternative will provide approximately 24 million board feet (MMBF) of timber that will contribute to the Forest Service's aim to meet market demand while remaining consistent with the Forest Plan. Current timber market analysis indicates that timber demand exceeds timber supply. Timber from this sale is a component of the ten year timber sale schedule used to provide an even flow of timber to industry. The timber volume is also a substantial component of the Stikine Area annual sale program to be offered in 1998. The mid-market analysis contained in the Final EIS resulted in a net stumpage value of \$19.52 per thousand board feet (MBF) for the selected alternative.

Scenery

Unit location and design were carefully considered in all alternatives to minimize scenic impact. The selected alternative maintains the highest scenic condition of all the action alternatives. Visual Quality Objectives ranging from Retention to Partial Retention are expected from priority viewing areas. This modification of scenic quality is less impacting than that allowed under the Forest Plan standards and guidelines.

Public Involvement

Ongoing public involvement has been instrumental in identifying and clarifying the issues of this project. Open houses, public meetings, scoping letters, news releases, Federal Register Notices, the Stikine Area Project Schedule, group and individual meetings, and reviewing comments from previous Kuiu Island analyses were some of the tools used to gather input for this project.

Notice of Intent: A Notice of Intent to Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement was published in the Federal Register on August 29, 1997, when it was decided that an EIS was needed for the project.

Public Comment Received on the Draft EIS: Comments on the Crane and Rowan Mountain Timber Sales Draft EIS were received from February 6 to March 30, 1998. Thirteen letters were received during the comment period and were responded to in the Final EIS (Appendix C).

Coordination With Other Agencies

From the time scoping was initiated, meetings and site visits with all interested state and federal agencies, and the Organized Village of Kake have occurred. Issues were discussed and information was exchanged.

Record of Decision

The Final EIS identifies the agencies that were informed of and/or involved in the planning process (see Listing of Document Recipients in Chapter 5).

Alternatives

Alternatives Considered in Detail

Five alternatives were considered in detail in the Final EIS. Each action alternative is consistent with the Tongass Land Management Plan (1997). For a complete description of each alternative refer to Chapter 2 of the Final EIS.

Alternative 1 - This alternative does not propose any timber harvest or road construction (no action) in the Crane and Rowan Mountain project area, and it is the most responsive to maintaining current wildlife habitat, scenery, and watershed conditions since it defers harvest. It would not move the project area toward the desired future condition that is described in the Forest Plan.

Alternative 2 - This alternative would offer the second largest amount of timber volume to large and small operators and provides the best economic return of all of the alternatives. All of this harvest would be by clearcut methods.

Alternative 3 - Alternative 3 responds primarily to public concerns surrounding wildlife habitat, scenery and watershed resources and approaches the volume objectives of the proposed action. Harvesting some units with partial harvest methods rather than clearcutting would reduce fragmentation, watershed, and visual impacts.

Alternative 4 - This alternative responds to the timber economics, wildlife habitat and fragmentation, scenery and watershed issues. Alternative 4 is comprised of all the units in Alternative 2 except two. One unit in the Security Creek watershed was dropped to lower the risk to watershed resources. On Rowan Mountain, one unit was dropped and other partial harvest units were enlarged or added to better emulate natural disturbance patterns.

Alternative 5 - Alternative 5 responds primarily to public concerns surrounding watershed resources and timber economics. This alternative drops all harvest from the Security Creek watershed in order to lower the risk to the watershed resource. Dropping these units would also decrease impacts on fragmentation and the visual resource in this watershed.

Environmentally Preferred Alternative

Based on a comparison of all the alternatives and the discussion contained within Chapter 3 of the Final EIS, Alternative 1, the no action alternative, would cause the least environmental disturbance. Of the action alternatives, Alternative 4 is the environmentally preferred alternative.

Alternatives Dropped From Further Review

The original selected alternative from the North and East Kuiu Final EIS was considered in the development of the Crane and Rowan Mountain project analysis. This alternative was dropped from consideration since it would not meet the current Forest Plan standards and guidelines.

Administrative Record

The Administrative Record for this project includes the Draft EIS, Final EIS, Tongass Land and Resource Management Plan, and all material incorporated by reference including the planning record.

Mitigation

Mitigation includes measures taken to avoid, reduce, or minimize the adverse effects of actions. These measures were applied in the development of alternatives and in the design of harvest units and road corridors. Mitigation measures common to all action alternatives are discussed in Chapter 2.

Mitigation measures applicable to the selected alternative include measures contained in the Tongass Land and Resource Management Plan (1997) and in Forest Service Manuals and Handbooks. The Final EIS includes the site-specific mitigation measures described in Chapter 2 and in the unit plans and road management objectives in Appendix A. These measures are adopted as part of this decision and will be implemented. All practical means to avoid or minimize the adverse environmental effects of the selected alternative have been adopted.

Monitoring

Resource management objectives and mitigation measures specified in an EIS are evaluated by the Forest Service through monitoring. Monitoring requirements are listed in Chapter 2 of the Final EIS. These requirements are adopted as part of this decision and will be implemented.

Findings Required By Law

National Forest Management Act

The National Forest Management Act (NFMA) requires specific determinations in the Record of Decision: consistency with existing Forest Plans and Regional Guides, a determination of clearcutting as the optimal method of harvesting, and specific authorizations of clearcuts over 100 acres in size.

Tongass Land Management Plan and Alaska Regional Guide

This decision is consistent with the Alaska Regional Guide and the Tongass Land Management Plan. I have reviewed the management direction, standards and guidelines, and the schedule of activities for the VCU's included in the selected alternative, and I find the selected alternative to be consistent with these elements.

Record of Decision

Clearcutting as the Optimal Method of Harvesting

Of the 22 harvest units planned in the selected alternative, portions of nine units have a stand management objective of timber production. All or part of these units will be harvested by a single regeneration harvest. Approximately 10 percent of the overstory trees will be left resulting in a predominantly even-aged stand. In all or part of 21 units, between 50 to 60 percent of the overstory canopy will be retained within the stand to provide biological legacies and large woody debris for the future. These stands will be harvested in a single regeneration harvest, and the remaining stand will be a mix of ages. In addition, for all units, one large spruce will be retained for each 10 acres as a food source for red squirrels and to insure a biological legacy.

I have determined that the use of clearcutting with reserves to achieve the unit objectives is the optimal silvicultural method for this project for the following reasons:

- The use of clearcutting with reserves will meet the objective of maintaining fast growing stands of mixed species.
- Logging costs are lower than with other silvicultural systems.
- Natural regeneration of spruce and hemlock is increased after cutting.
- Exposure to the sun raises soil temperature, which speeds decomposition and nutrient cycling, thereby improving the productivity of the sites.
- Clearcutting with reserves should minimize the potential of logging injury in units that are cable yarded.
- Clearcutting favors regeneration of Sitka spruce by destroying much of the advanced hemlock regeneration and by creating more favorable conditions for spruce regeneration.

Harvest Openings Over 100 Acres in Size

There are no harvest openings over 100 acres proposed for this project.

Tongass Timber Reform Act (TTRA)

Harvest units were designed and located to maintain a minimum 100 foot buffer for all Class I streams and Class II streams that flow directly into Class I streams as required in Section 103 of the TTRA. As discussed in Appendix A of the Final EIS, the actual widths of these buffers will often be greater than the 100 foot minimum. The design and implementation direction for the selected alternative incorporate Best Management Practices (BMP's) for the protection of all stream classes.

Endangered Species Act

Actions authorized in the selected alternative are not anticipated to have a direct, indirect, or cumulative effect on any threatened or endangered species in the Crane and Rowan Mountain project area. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service have concurred that the actions described within the proposed project are not likely to adversely affect threatened and endangered species. A complete biological assessment is included in the planning record for this project. I have determined that this action will not have any adverse impacts on any threatened or endangered species.

Bald Eagle Protection Act

Management activities within 330 feet of an eagle nest site are restricted by a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Forest Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to facilitate compliance with the Bald Eagle Protection Act. The selected alternative is not anticipated to have a significant direct, indirect, or cumulative affect on any bald eagle habitat.

Clean Water Act

The design of harvest units and roads for the Selected alternative was guided by standards, guidelines, and direction contained in the Tongass Land and Resource Management Plan, Alaska Regional Guide, and applicable Forest Service manuals and handbooks. The unit plans and road management objectives in Appendix A contain specific details on practices prescribed to prevent or reduce non-point sediment sources. Reasonable implementation with site specific application and monitoring of approved BMP's is expected to comply with applicable State Water Quality Standards regulation.

These regulations provide for variances from anti-degradation requirements and water quality criteria. The harvest and road building operators will be responsible for compliance, including obtaining any variance required by the State, and will be monitored for compliance by the Forest Service. The Forest Service expects the Crane and Rowan Mountain Timber Sales project area activities to fully qualify for any variance required by the State, according to the criteria in 18 AAC 70.015.

All roads, landings, and rock pits for this project will be designed to a minimum standard to accommodate timber harvesting and silvicultural activities and will be constructed in accordance with Best Management Practices listed in 33 CFR 323.4(a). Therefore, no permits under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act are required.

National Historic Preservation Act

Cultural resource surveys of various intensities have been conducted in the project area. The State Historic Preservation Officer has been consulted, and I have complied with the provisions of 36 CFR part 800. I have determined that there will be no significant effects on cultural resources.

Federal Cave Resource Protection Act of 1988

The actions in the selected alternative will not have a direct, indirect, or cumulative effect on any significant cave in the Crane and Rowan Mountain project area. No cave resources have been documented in the project area and no caves were discovered during field work done for this analysis.

ANILCA Section 810, Subsistence Evaluation and Findings

A subsistence evaluation was conducted for the five alternatives considered in detail, in accordance with ANILCA Section 810. The evaluations in the Subsistence Report on abundance or distribution, access, and competition for harvested resources in the project area indicate that there will not be a significant possibility of a significant restriction on subsistence uses of deer, other wildlife, fish, shellfish, marine mammals, other foods, and timber resources as a result of this sale.

Record of Decision

Coastal Zone Management Act

The Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972 (CZMA), while specifically excluding Federal lands from the coastal zone, requires that a federal agency's activities be consistent with the enforceable standards of a state's coastal management program to the maximum extent practicable when the agency's activities affect the coastal zone.

The enforceable standards for timber harvest activities are found in the State Forest Practices Act. The standards and guidelines for timber management activities in the Crane and Rowan Mountain project area meet or exceed the standards in the State Forest Practices Act.

I have determined that the proposed activities are consistent with the Alaska Coastal Management Program to the maximum extent practicable. The Alaska Division of Governmental Coordination has reviewed this determination and concurred with the finding.

Executive Orders

EO 11988 - Executive Order 11988 directs Federal agencies to take action to avoid, to the extent possible, the long and short-term adverse impacts associated with the occupancy and modification of floodplains. The numerous streams in the Crane and Rowan Mountain project area make it impossible to avoid all floodplains during timber harvest and road construction. The design of the proposed developments and the application of Best Management Practices combine to minimize adverse impacts to floodplains.

EO 11990 - Executive Order 11990 requires federal agencies to avoid, to the extent possible, the long and short-term adverse impacts associated with the destruction or modification of wetlands. Soil moisture regimes and vegetation on some wetlands may be altered in some harvest units; however, affected wetlands would still be classified as wetlands and function as wetlands in the ecosystem.

Because they are so extensive in the project area, it is not feasible to avoid all wetlands. However, no development activities are planned on the more biologically significant wetlands. In all alternatives, roads and units were located to avoid these areas. Road construction fills wetlands and creates permanent loss of wetland habitat. Effects will be minimized by not using wetlands as sites for overburden disposal. Implementation of BMP's, such as minimizing ditching and providing adequate cross drainage, will also help minimize the area affected.

EO 12962 - Executive Order 12962 directs Federal agencies to conserve, restore and enhance aquatic systems to provide for increased recreational fishing opportunities nationwide. Section 1 of the Executive Order is most pertinent to the proposed activity. Section 1 directs Federal agencies to evaluate effects on aquatic ecosystems and recreational fisheries, develop and encourage partnerships, promote restoration, provide access, and promote awareness of opportunities for recreational fishery resources.

The effects of this project have been evaluated throughout the Final EIS, including effects to freshwater and marine resources. Partnerships are continuing to be used to leverage Federal project funds to address water quality concerns in areas of the Tongass National Forest, although none have been proposed for recreational fisheries in conjunction with this project.

Under the selected alternative, new road closures would only provide access for recreational fishing opportunities to those willing to walk into the project area. Existing access will not be affected. Since most recreational fishing is expected to remain at saltwater and at other locations accessible by roads, the impact of improved access on recreational fishing opportunities is expected to be minor.

EO12898 - Executive Order 12898 directs Federal agencies to identify and address the issue of environmental justice, such as adverse human health and environmental effects of agency programs that disproportionately impact minority and low income populations. Implementation of the selected alternative will not cause adverse health or environmental effects that disproportionately impact minority and low income populations. The timber sale schedule for the Tongass National Forest attempts to distribute harvest activities across all suitable forest lands to not effect any one community disproportionately.

Federal and State Permits

Federal and State permits necessary to implement the authorized activities are listed in Chapter 1 of the Final EIS.

Implementation Process

Implementation of this decision may occur no sooner than 30 days after the date of publication of the Notice of Availability of the Final EIS in the Federal Register, or 50 days following publication of the public notice of the decision in the Petersburg Pilot, published in Petersburg, Alaska, whichever is later. This timber sale is planned to be offered in the fall of 1998.

This project will be implemented in accordance with Forest Service Manual and Handbook direction for Timber Sale project Implementation in FSM 2431.3 and FSH 2409.24. This direction provides a bridge between project planning and implementation and will ensure execution of the actions, environmental standards, and mitigation approved by this decision, and compliance with TTRA and other laws. All Best Management Practices (BMP's) will be applied to the selected alternative.

Implementation of all activities authorized by the Record of Decision will be monitored to ensure that they are carried out as planned and described in the Final EIS.

Appendix A of the Final EIS contains harvest unit plans and road management objectives. These plans and objectives are a significant part of this decision because they document the specific resource concerns, management objectives, and mitigation measures to govern the layout of the harvest units and construction of roads. They will be used during the implementation process to assure that all aspects of the project are implemented within the standards and guidelines and that resource impacts will not be greater than those described in the Final EIS.

Record of Decision

Procedure for Changes During Implementation

Proposed changes to the authorized project actions will be subject to the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the National Forest Management Act of 1976 (NFMA), Section 810 of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA), the Tongass Timber Reform Act (TTRA), the Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA), and other laws concerning such changes.

In determining whether and what kind of NEPA action is required, the Assistant Forest Supervisor will consider the criteria for whether to supplement an existing environmental impact statement (EIS) in 40 CFR 1502.9(c), and FSH 1909.15, sec. 18, and in particular, whether the proposed change is a substantial change to the selected alternative as planned and already approved, and whether the change is relevant to environmental concerns. Connected or interrelated proposed changes regarding particular areas of specific activities will be considered together in making this determination. The cumulative impacts of these changes will also be considered.

The intent of field verification is to confirm inventory data and to determine the feasibility and general design and location of a unit or road, not to locate final boundaries or road locations. Minor adjustments to unit boundaries are also likely during final layout for the purpose of improving logging system efficiency. This will usually entail adjusting the boundary to coincide with logical logging setting boundaries. Many of these minor changes will not present sufficient potential impacts to require any specific documentation or other action to comply with applicable laws. Some minor changes may still require appropriate analysis and documentation to comply with FSH 1909.15, sec. 18.

Right to Appeal

This decision is subject to administrative appeal. Organizations or members of the general public may appeal this decision according to Title 36 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 215. The appeal must be filed within 45 days of the date that legal notification of this decision is published in the Petersburg Pilot, the official newspaper of record. The Notice of Appeal must be filed in duplicate with:

Regional Forester
Forest Service
U.S. Department of Agriculture
P.O. Box 21628
Juneau, AK 99802-1628

It is the responsibility of those who appeal a decision to provide the Regional Forester sufficient written evidence and rationale to show why the decision by the Assistant Forest Supervisor should be changed or reversed. This written Notice of Appeal must:

1. State that the document is a Notice of Appeal filed pursuant to 36 CFR Part 215;
2. List the name, address, and, if possible, the telephone number of the appellant;

3. Identify the decision document by title and subject, date of the decision, and name and title of the Responsible Official;
4. Identify the specific change(s) in the decision that the appellant seeks or portion of the decision to which the appellant objects;
5. State how the Responsible Official's decision fails to consider comments previously provided, either before or during the comment period specified in 36 CFR 215.6, if applicable, how the appellant believes the decision violates law, regulation or policy.

For additional information concerning this decision, contact Everett Kissinger, Interdisciplinary Team Leader, Stikine Area, P.O. Box 309, Petersburg, AK 99833, or call (907) 772-3841.



CAROL J. JORGENSEN
Assistant Forest Supervisor

6-30-98

Date:

Summary

Introduction

Alaska Wilderness Recreation and Tourism Association (AWRTA), et al. vs. Morrison, et al. resulted in a settlement agreement that “maintained an injunction pending compliance with NEPA and ANILCA Section 810” for certain units approved in the North and East Kuiu Final Environmental Statement (FEIS) Record of Decision (ROD).

The unroaded east Kuiu portion, which was the basis of a subsistence finding of “a significant possibility of a significant restriction” was separated from the already developed north Kuiu area (N&E Kuiu FEIS, 1993).

This Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) documents our efforts to comply with the AWRTA settlement agreement and make decisions about possible timber sales within the Crane and Rowan Mountain project area on north Kuiu Island. These decisions will be based upon laws and other direction and upon public needs and concerns.

In this EIS we describe a Proposed Action and three other alternative approaches to harvesting timber and building and maintaining roads to make timber on Kuiu Island available for harvest within the project area. The No Action Alternative is presented and the agency’s Preferred Alternative is identified. We have also disclosed the environmental effects and resource outputs expected from the Proposed Action and each of the alternatives.

We developed alternatives to address concerns from the public and from the Forest Plan. The key issues addressed are Habitat Conservation, Watershed Effects, Timber Economics and Scenery. A management strategy to maintain natural forest disturbance patterns is used to address several of the issues.

Transition to the New Forest Plan

The Record of Decision (ROD) for the 1997 Forest Plan includes instructions for transitioning from the old plan to the revised Forest Plan. Timber sale projects which were initiated under the direction of the 1979 Forest Plan, and which will be completed within the next few years, may be affected to varying degrees by the revised Forest Plan. The ROD describes four categories of timber sale projects, and their relationship to the 1997 Forest Plan. The Crane and Rowan Mountain Timber Sales project is identified under Category 3: “Timber sale projects now being planned, but for which a NEPA decision document will not be signed before the effective date of this Plan” (TLMP ROD, 1997, p. 41).

The ROD directs that Category 3 projects need to be consistent with applicable management direction in the Forest Plan except for new standards and guidelines for wildlife addressing landscape connectivity, endemic terrestrial mammals, northern goshawk, and marten management. Discussions of direct, indirect and cumulative effects for these wildlife resources have been included in Chapter 3 of this FEIS.

The Crane and Rowan Mountain FEIS is ‘tiered’ to the Forest Plan, and also to the Alaska Regional Guide EIS (USDA Forest Service, 1983). General discussions from these documents and the administrative planning record are incorporated by reference rather than repeated in this EIS (40 CFR 1502.21). (See Literature Cited in Chapter 7.)

Purpose and Need

The Crane and Rowan Mountain Timber Sales project is proposed at this time to respond to the goals and objectives identified by the Forest Plan and to move the project area towards the desired future condition. The Forest Plan identified the following goals and objectives:

- To maintain and promote industrial wood production from suitable timberlands, providing a continuous supply of wood to meet society's needs.
- To manage these lands for sustained long-term timber yields.
- To seek to provide a supply of timber from the Tongass National Forest which meets the annual and planning-cycle market demand, consistent with the standards and guidelines of this Land Use Designation.

The Crane and Rowan Mountain Timber Sales project will respond to these goals and objectives by using an ecosystem management approach to moving the project area toward the desired future condition. We will accomplish this by incorporating the principles of disturbance ecology. We will manage suitable timberlands for the production of sawtimber and other wood products while maintaining the natural disturbance patterns found within the project area that provides a range of wildlife habitat. More detailed information on timber market demand, local employment opportunities and timber harvest scheduling is available in the planning file.

Proposed Action

At the start of our project planning process we defined a “proposed action” so that the public and other agencies would know more about the project. The “proposed action” identified at the start of a project does not necessarily end up being the “preferred” or final “selected” alternative.

The Proposed Action (Alternative 2) is to harvest approximately 23 MMBF of timber from 738 acres. About 6.6 miles of specified road and 2.4 miles of temporary road would be constructed. The existing Rowan Bay log transfer facility (LTF) would be used for transport of logs by barge.

Background

For this project, we chose to put forth as the proposed action the units as they were shown in the North and East (N&E) Kuiu EIS with the new Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines applied. The timber harvest units were originally part of the N&E Kuiu Record of Decision (1993) which made timber available to the Alaska Pulp Corporation under the now terminated APC long term timber sale contract. Efforts to sell portions of the N&E Kuiu units under the Stikine Area's independent timber sale program were legally challenged (*AWRTA v. Morrison*) resulting in a Settlement Agreement, which required further NEPA consideration. The Stikine Area then decided to separate the unroaded east Kuiu area from the already developed north Kuiu area and begin the NEPA process for the two timber sales being considered here.

The Crane and Rowan Mountain Timber Sales NEPA process began as two separate Environmental Assessments (EAs). In response to public input, we decided to document the analysis of these two proposed timber sales in this EIS.

Decision to be Made

The Crane and Rowan Mountain Timber Sales EIS, as a project-level analysis, does not address decisions made at higher levels such as the Forest Plan. It does implement direction provided at those higher levels.

The Stikine Area Forest Supervisor is the deciding official and will decide:

- If, where and how much harvest will occur in the Crane and Rowan Mountain project area,

- The locations and design of road construction,
- Whether there may be a significant restriction on subsistence uses,
- What mitigation measures and monitoring will be implemented, and
- The extent to which the project will mimic natural disturbance processes and maintain the natural disturbance patterns existing in the project area.

Public Involvement

Scoping

“Public Scoping” is the term used to describe the process of finding the key issues for a project by contacting interested individuals and agencies to determine their concerns. The north Kuiu project area has been the subject of many planning efforts since the 1970’s. Scoping results from those projects have been used to design this timber sale project. As a condition of the settlement agreement in the AWRTA v. Morrison case, three public meetings were held in Kake and one in Point Baker to discuss the management of Kuiu Island including future timber sales. A report on these meetings is available in the planning file for this project as well as in the planning record for the TLMP revision. The following is a list of letters, contacts, and meetings that took place during the planning of this project.

Spring, Summer and Fall, 1997– Stikine Area Project Schedule lists this project

April, 1997 – Initial scoping letter and newspaper announcements

August, 1997 – Public Scoping Update after decision to do an EIS

August 1997 – Notice of Intent is published in the Federal Register

November, 1997 – Public Open House in Petersburg and Kake

Various meetings, field trips, and written correspondence with individuals, agencies, and organizations including: Alaska Dept. of Fish and Game, National Marine Fisheries Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation, the Office of General Counsel.

Key Issues

Based on the responses to public scoping and on internal concerns, we refined the list of preliminary issues from the scoping letters and the Notice of Intent into key issues. These issues are within the scope of project analysis and are used to create different action alternatives.

Habitat Conservation

Issue – The degree to which each alternative affects wildlife habitat. We will focus on habitat for deer and marten.

Comments – Many individuals and agencies expressed concern about fragmentation and connectivity for wildlife species and their habitat requirements. Concerns were expressed regarding the goshawk, wolf, and peregrine falcon. Also of concern are the potential impacts to deer populations and their contribution to subsistence use.

Measurement – We will use wildlife habitat capability models to compare the changes in habitat between the alternatives. We will also measure the number of acres of different prescriptions and discuss the impacts to important wildlife habitat.

We will mimic the natural disturbance processes across the landscape as a way to address forest fragmentation and connectivity. We’ll measure this by comparing the forest mosaic in terms of habitat suitability at several different time periods and landscape levels. We will describe how each action alternative will contribute to the desired future condition.

Summary

Watershed Effects

Issue – The degree to which watersheds are at risk for undesirable flow response and reduction in water quality.

Comments – The public comment included concerns about cumulative watershed effects.

Measurement – We calculate the proposed and cumulative road miles and harvest acres in affected watersheds.

Timber Economics

Issue – The degree to which each alternative provides an economic timber sale.

Comments – There was concern about the rising costs associated with logging especially where conventional yarding methods are replaced by helicopter yarding. The miles of existing and proposed roads were also concerns for harvest economics.

Measurement – We will estimate the volume to be harvested in each alternative and show the relative costs and benefits at an average market by using different yarding systems. We will also show the miles of road to be constructed and display how this affects economics.

Scenery

Issue – The degree to which each alternative will affect the landscape character of the Crane/Rowan Mountain project area, and to what extent harvest units are designed to maintain scenic quality as outlined in the Forest Plan.

Comments – Comments were received addressing the potential impacts of timber harvesting on the scenic quality, particularly as seen from Chatham Strait and other saltwater viewing locations. Other concerns expressed maintaining a pristine condition for all of Kuiu Island. Individuals specifically mentioned scenic considerations along the face of Rowan Mountain.

Measurement – We will describe the Visual Quality Objective (VQO) achieved in each alternative and compare it to those adopted in the Forest Plan. We will measure the cumulative level of visual disturbance in each VCU and compare the alternatives.

Other Environmental Considerations

Other resource issues are important, but were not used to drive alternative development. The main effects on recreation are related to the scenery issue and will be covered in that section. The other recreation effects will be minimal and similar regardless of the alternative picked. Other resources are protected to such a degree by the Standards and Guidelines in the Forest Plan and by other laws and constraints that the effects from each of the alternatives are not significant and are essentially the same. A more detailed discussion of these important resources and the protection measures used for them is in the Other Environmental Considerations section in Chapter 3.

Issues Outside the Scope of this Analysis

These are issues raised by the public that are beyond the scope of this document. We received comments from people who wanted no more timber harvest on Kuiu Island and from people who wanted more of Kuiu Island to be made available for timber harvest. The difficult task of allocating land to different uses was done in the Forest Plan (TLMP, 1997). The Plan looks at multiple use for the Tongass as a whole and determines what areas are best used in what ways. These land allocation issues are outside the scope of this project level analysis.

Alternatives Considered in Detail

Alternative 1 (No Action)

With this alternative we analyze the effects of having no timber sale or road construction in the Crane and Rowan Mountain project area. This alternative is provided so that you can see the changes that the other alternatives have on the social, physical, and biological environment. This alternative is the most responsive to maintaining current wildlife habitat, scenery and watershed condition by deferring harvest. It would not move the project area toward the desired future condition that is stated in the Forest Plan (TLMP, 1997). Table 2-1 and Figure 2-10 displays the no action alternative.

Alternative 2 (Proposed Action)

The proposed action would harvest approximately 23 MMBF of timber from about 738 acres. It would offer the second most volume to potential large and small operators and provides the best economic return of all of the alternatives. Table 2-1 and Figure 2-11 displays the specific activities. All of this harvest would be clearcut¹ and would use cable or helicopter yarding. Approximately 6.59 miles of specified road and 2.42 miles of temporary road would be constructed to access some of this timber and provide infrastructure for future sales. This and all other action alternatives will use the existing Rowan Bay LTF for log barging. This alternative serves as the basis of comparison for the other alternatives.

Alternative 3

Alternative 3 responds primarily to public concerns surrounding wildlife habitat, scenery and watershed resources. Harvesting some units as partial cuts rather than clearcuts would reduce fragmentation and watershed and visual impacts. This alternative would harvest approximately 17.8 MMBF of timber from about 738 acres. This includes 210 acres of clearcuts and 528 acres of partial harvest. Approximately 6.59 miles of specified road and 2.42 miles of temporary road would be constructed to access some of this timber and provide infrastructure for future sales. This and all other action alternatives will use the existing Rowan Bay LTF for log barging. Table 2-1 and Figure 2-12 display the specific activities involved in Alternative 3.

Alternative 4 (Preferred Action)

Alternative 4 responds to the timber economics, wildlife habitat and fragmentation, scenery and watershed issues. Alternative 4 comprises all of the units in Alternative 2 except for two. One clearcut unit in the Security Creek watershed was dropped to lower the risk to watershed resources. On Rowan Mountain, one clearcut unit was dropped and other partial harvest units enlarged or added to better maintain natural disturbance patterns. This alternative would harvest approximately 24 MMBF of timber from about 1056 acres. This includes 159 acres of clearcut and 897 acres of partial harvest. Approximately 6.59 miles of specified road and 1.4 miles of temporary road would be constructed to access some of this timber and provide infrastructure for future sales. This and all other action alternatives will use the existing Rowan Bay LTF for log barging. Table 2-1 and Figure 2-13 display the specific activities involved in Alternative 4.

Alternative 5

Alternative 5 responds primarily to public concerns surrounding watershed resources and timber economics. This alternative drops all harvest from the Security Creek watershed in order to lower the risk to the watershed resource. Dropping these units would also decrease impacts on fragmentation and the visual resource in this watershed. This alternative then uses all of the other clearcut units from Alternative 2 and adds units 402-50 and 402-51 on Rowan Mountain. This alternative would harvest approximately 21 MMBF of timber from about 712 acres. This includes 548 acres of clearcut and 164 acres of partial harvest. Approximately 6.59 miles of specified road and 1.49 miles of temporary road would be constructed to access some of this timber and provide infrastructure for future sales. This and all other action alternatives will use the existing Rowan Bay LTF for log barging. Table 2-1 and Figure 2-14 display the specific activities involved in Alternative 5.

¹ Clearcutting is an even aged silvicultural system used to manage forest stands. All clearcut systems planned in this project will include retention of wildlife legacies.

Alternative Comparison

Tables 1. Summary Comparison of Alternatives

	Alternative 1	Alternative 2	Alternative 3	Alternative 4	Alternative 5
Harvest Volume (MMBF)	0	23.0	17.8	24.0	21.0
Clear Cut (acres)	0	738	210	159	548
Partial Cut (acres)	0	0	528	897	164
Helicopter Yarding (acres)	0	227	227	629	263
Cable/Shovel Yarding (acres)	0	511	511	427	449
Specified Road (miles)	0	6.59	6.59	6.59	6.59
Temporary Road (miles)	0	2.42	2.42	1.40	1.49
Net Stumpage Value (\$ per MBF)	0	\$48.88	\$5.72	\$19.52	\$34.45
Indicated Advertised Rates (\$ per MBF)	0	\$93.09	\$64.64	\$63.35	\$84.23
Visual Quality Objective Achieved	Retention	Partial retention/Max modification	Partial retention/Modification	Retention/Partial retention	Partial retention/Max modification
POG Harvested Project Area	0	0.64%	0.41%	0.52%	0.54%
Deer Habitat Capability Year 2040	81%	80%	80%	80%	80%
<i>Security Creek</i> Roads (miles)	0	1	1	0	0
Harvest (acres)	0	167 CC	167 PC	352 PC	0
<i>Dean Creek</i> Roads (miles)	0	0	0	0	0
Harvest (acres)	0	47 CC	47 PC	47 PC	47 CC

Alternatives Dropped From Further Review

We considered including the original selected alternative from the N&E Kuiu EIS as an alternative in this EIS. This alternative was dropped, however, because it doesn't meet the Standards and Guidelines found in the Forest Plan.

Mitigation Measures

The Forest Service uses a variety of mitigation measures in the design and implementation of timber sales to avoid or reduce impacts to the environment. Law requires some of these mitigation measures; for example, streamside buffers. Some are included as direction from the Forest Plan. Others are very specific to a particular location or unit. These actions and their site-specific application are documented on the unit and road cards in Appendix B. Described below are the mitigation measures we will use for this project under all action alternatives.

Cultural Resources

Based on inventory work in the Crane and Rowan Mountain project area and elsewhere in southeast Alaska, we developed a model to help us locate those areas where cultural resources are most likely to be found. This model helps identify areas where we will intensively survey for cultural sites prior to any ground-disturbing activity. If additional cultural resources are located, appropriate mitigation and protection will be designed in consultation with the Alaska State Historic Preservation Officer.

Best Management Practices

Best Management Practices (BMPs) are operating procedures designed to protect water quality. The development of BMPs is mandated by the Clean Water Act. The BMPs for the Tongass National Forest are the result of extensive efforts between the Forest Service and the State of Alaska to identify practices that will ensure that timber harvest activities minimize soil erosion and protect aquatic habitat. The unit and road cards in Appendix B describe site-specific application of BMPs.

Stream-side Buffers

The Tongass Timber Reform Act mandates a minimum 100-foot wide, no-harvest buffer on both sides of all Class I streams and on those Class II streams that flow directly into Class I streams. The Forest Plan Riparian Standards and Guidelines provide further direction for protection of riparian management areas. Many streamside buffers are wider than the 100-foot TTRA buffer. Specific information about streamside buffers is located on the unit cards in Appendix B.

Marbled Murrelets

Marbled murrelets are common in the waters around the analysis area. No known nests have been located. If a nest sited is located, a 30-acre buffer surrounding the nest will be provided. Roads can enter this buffer if unavoidable, but every effort will be made to protect the nest site.

Goshawks

The goshawk is not presently classified as Threatened and Endangered but it is recognized as a Regional Sensitive Species. Two goshawk nests are known to exist in the project area. A 100-acre buffer has been placed around the nest near Rowan Creek. The other nest is located near Fall Dog Creek and is in an Old Growth Land Use Designation that will not be harvested. If other goshawk nests should be found in the project area during this project we will implement the buffer requirements in the Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines.

Key Wildlife Habitats and Timing Restrictions

No harvest is scheduled within 1,000 feet of the beach or within 1,000 feet of estuaries. Minimum clearing widths will be used on the roads. Old growth habitat reserves have been designated in the project area for all alternatives and are shown on the alternative maps. These blocks of habitat were selected in the Forest Plan. Harvest is precluded in these areas. In addition, more old growth will remain in areas that are classified as unsuitable for timber production (such as very steep areas and stream buffers).

Record of Decision

Legend

- Existing Partial Harvest
- Existing Clearcut
(Existing includes harvested and NEPA-approved prior to Crane/Rowan EIS)
- Proposed Clearcut Harvest Units
- Proposed Diameter Limit Harvest Units
- Lakes and Salt Water
- FDREST WIND DISTURBANCE PRDBABILITY:
 - Low (Gap Phase Processes)
 - Moderate (Mixed Disturbance Processes)
 - High (Stand Replacement Processes)
- Helicopter Yarding
- Crane/Rowan Mt Project Area Boundary
- Existing Dpen Roads
- Existing Closed Roads
- Proposed Roads
- 500-ft Contours



STIKINE AREA VICINITY MAP
MAP AREA SHOWN IN ORANGE

0 7920 15840



/gis/projects/crane_rowan/plots/docmaps/rod.map
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Crane/Rowan Mountain Timber Harvest EIS
Record of Decision



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